

ON CLAUSAL SUBJECTS AND EXTRAPOSITION IN THE HISTORY OF ENGLISH

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Abstract

This study deals with disputed issues in the history of English concerning predicates that alternately take (i) a preposed clausal subject and (ii) a subject *it* in conjunction with a propositional subclause. Situated within the theoretical framework of Lexical Functional Grammar and based on present-day and historical corpora of English, the dissertation presents a number of claims with respect to the syntax and argument structure as well as the pragmatic and processing-related aspects of the relevant constructions. It is shown that, while all types of clauses can be analysed as morphosyntactic subjects in Early and Late Modern English, only infinitival clauses, and not *that*-clauses or *wh*-clauses, can be analysed as structural subjects. In Old and Middle English, the data is inconclusive as to the analysis of subclauses as subjects.

With respect to the co-occurrence of a subject *it* and a propositional subclause, two distinct constructions are recognised: (i) *it*+ADJ and (ii) *it*+COMP. *It*+ADJ has a thematic subject *it* in conjunction with an adjunct subclause, while *it*+COMP has a non-thematic subject *it* in conjunction with a complement subclause. *It*+ADJ is available at all stages of the history of English, while *it*+COMP seems to emerge in connection to the development of raising verbs.

Concerning pragmatic and processing-related aspects of the constructions, weight, complexity and information structure all have considerable effects on the choice of construction in both present-day and historical English. For the Present-day English data, it is shown that there is a cut-off point in the weight distribution of the constructions favouring one construction or the other. It is also shown that subclauses lacking an anaphoric relation to the previous discourse exclusively occur in the *it*+subclause construction, while subclauses expressing polar contrast exclusively occur in the preposed clausal subject construction.

KEYWORDS: clausal subjects, extraposition, History of English, argument structure, weight, complexity, information structure, Lexical-Functional Grammar, Lexical Mapping Theory